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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: PM MELES WELCOMES USG ENGAGEMENT ON
SOMALIA, CALLS IT GREATEST LONG-TERM SECURITY THREAT

Classified By: DAS Don Yamamoto for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) Summary: PM Meles told visiting DAS Don Yamamoto Nov. 29 that Ethiopia welcomed increased USG engagement on Somalia. He called the rise of extremism in Somalia the greatest long-term security threat to the region, but said there was still time to address it before the danger increased. Meles said Ethiopia no longer favored the use of foreign peacekeeping troops; Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) should over time be able to handle its own security. The TFG would need outside resources, however, to establish itself and begin governing. End Summary.

2. (C) AF DAS Don Yamamoto met Prime Minister Meles Zenawi Nov. 29, accompanied by Charge Vicki Huddleston and PolEcon Counselor. MFA Director for European and American Affairs Grum Abay and a notetaker joined Meles. Septel will cover discussion on the Eritrean border situation and the internal political situation.

Yamamoto: USG Will Increase Engagement on Somalia and
Somaliland

3. (S) DAS Yamamoto told PM Meles that the USG was looking for ways of promoting engagement in Somalia. Coordinating efforts with regional allies like Ethiopia was essential to understanding the Somalia issue. He noted that Ethiopia was the only regional state that bordered both Somalia and Somaliland. Yamamoto conveyed USG appreciation for the successful intelligence-sharing program between the U.S. and Ethiopia on Somalia. He recalled that the USG had initiated contact from Washington-based officials for the first time with the TFG at the UNGA in September, meeting Prime Minister Yusuf for the first time. The U.S. told Yusuf that if he built bridges to the TFG Speaker of Parliament and other warlords, the U.S. would engage him at a higher level.

GOE Supports Greater USG Role, Understands Limitations

4. (C) PM Meles called a more active U.S. approach "a relief for us." He said Somalia was the greatest long-run security threat for Ethiopia and the region, but there was a window now to act in order to reduce the risk posed by extremism based in Mogadishu. He said that for the moment, Somalia ports were the focal points for organized crime and links with Al Qaeda; dangerous elements had not yet made significant inroads inland toward Ethiopia. The PM said he understood that the U.S. could not give the same level of attention to Somalia as to other threats in the region, but that seeing the situation clearly was also important. If the U.S. were not on board, efforts to stabilize Somalia would fail. The TFG's Prime Minister had told Meles that he was hearing "positive signals" from the U.S. The EU was also sending such signals. Meles indicated that Ethiopia had "recoiled a bit" from involvement with its southern neighbor, but would like to be more proactive in stabilizing the situation.

5. (C) When Yamamoto mentioned continuing U.S. reluctance about introducing foreign peacekeeping troops in Somalia, the PM responded that Ethiopia no longer saw such troops as important to stabilizing the TFG. The important thing was for the U.S. and international community to give the TFG the "green light" to start operating against Islamic extremist groups. The TFG should over time develop the capacity to provide for its own security. Winning over the bulk of the population of Mogadishu would be important to achieve that goal, Meles said, and additional resources for the TFG could help with that.

Somaliland: Partner for Stability -- and Prosperity

6. (C) Meles told Yamamoto that Somaliland had resources that would allow the country to take care of itself. The GOE had been working with hydrocarbons experts to prospect in its own territory, but had been told that the real finds were located in Somaliland. Contractors had approached the GOE about participating in the construction of a gas pipeline from

Somaliland to Ethiopia, but there was still too much political uncertainty to proceed with the project for now. Nevertheless, Ethiopia would engage with Somaliland in order to stabilize the north part of Somali territory and then try to stabilize as much as possible of the south. At a minimum, such a strategy would "quarantine" problems in a more limited area. Amb. Yamamoto agreed that engaging with Somalia should be both a counter-terrorism and a development issue. He underscored concerns in the U.S. about Somali pirates' attacks on international shipping. Meles also noted that South Africa had visited Hargeisa and showed interest in Somaliland issues. U.S. interest would complement South African efforts.

HUDDLESTON